

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 BRASIL 01850 01 OF 03 191509Z

44

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2313

INFO AMCONSUL RIO DE JANEIRO

AMCONSUL SAO PAULO

AMCONSUL RECIFE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 BRASILIA 1850

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT BR

SUBJ: THE INTERREGNUM: SIGNS OF REOPENING

BEGIN SUMMARY

THE JANUARY 15-MARCH 15 PERIOD WAS MARKED BY MOUNTING DISCUSSION OF SIGNS OF A POSSIBLE POLITICAL OPENING IN THE GEISEL ADMINISTRATION. ONE EARLY ALLEGED PORTENT, ARENA PRESIDENT PORTELLA'S DESIGNATION TO COORDINATE THE CHOICE OF CANDIDATES WITH THE PARTY'S BASES, CAME A CROPPER. OTHER SIGNS WERE MORE DURABLE: PROFESSOR HUNTINGTON'S VISIT TO RIO, DURING WHICH HE MET WITH GEISEL INTIMATE GENERAL GOLBERY, ADDED "DECOMPRESSION" TO THE LOCAL POLITICAL LEXICON. MEETINGS BETWEEN GEISEL ADMINISTRATION REPRESENTATIVES AND CHURCH LEADERS LEFT THE LATTER GUARDEDLY HOPEFUL OF AN IMPROVEMENT IN CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS AND OF NEW POLITICAL DIRECTIONS UNDER THE GEISEL ADMINISTRATION. THE APPOINTMENT TO THE CABINET OF THREE POLITICIANS ALSO FUELED HOPES FOR A BROADER DECISION-MAKING BASE, WITH FALCAO TAKING THE LEAD ON PUBLIC STATEMENTS ON DIALOGUE. AGAINST THE CONSEQUENT RISING EXPECTATIONS THE NEW PRESIDENT WILL HAVE TO CONSIDER POTENTIAL RESISTANCE WITHIN THE ARMED FORCES TO SUCH CHANGES. THE CONFLICT SEEMS CERTAIN TO BE A SOURCE OF DIFFICULTY FOR THE

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 BRASIL 01850 01 OF 03 191509Z

NEW ADMINISTRATION NO MATTER HOW CAUTIOUSLY IT MOVES.

END SUMMARY

1. THE TWO-MONTH PERIOD BETWEEN GEISEL'S JANUARY 15 ELECTION AND HIS INAUGURATION ON MARCH 15 WAS A KIND OF INTERREGNUM MARKED BY GROWING SPECULATION AND DISCUSSION, MUCH OF IT PUBLIC, ABOUT POSSIBLE NEW DIRECTIONS IN THE GEISEL ADMINISTRATION. ONE STARTING POINT WAS THE IDEA THAT, HAVING SCORED UNARGUABLE SUCCESSES IN THE ECONOMIC, FINANCIAL, AND ADMINISTRATIVE FIELDS, NOTABLE (ALTHOUGH CRITICIZED) ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE SOCIAL FIELD, AND HAVING VIRTUALLY ELIMINATED THE THREAT OF SUBVERSION OR WIDESPREAD DISORDER, THE REVOLUTION OF 1964 COULD NOW TURN ITS ATTENTION TO THE POLITICAL SECTOR. PERHAPS A MORE BASIC IMPULSE WAS THE REVOLUTION'S LONG-EVIDENT CONCERN WITH ITS LEGITIMACY, A CONCERN WHICH HAS LED IT TO PONDER POSSIBLE MEANS OF INSTITUTIONALIZING ITS POWER THROUGH NORMAL AND DEMOCRATICALLY BASED POLITICAL STRUCTURES WITHOUT SEEING ITS ACHIEVEMENTS FRITTERED AWAY AND BRAZIL WEAKENED BY "UNSCRUPULOUS AND SELF-SEEKING" POLITICIANS MISLEADING A "POLITICALLY UNSOPHISTICATED" MASS.

2. DURING THE PERIOD VARIOUS TERMS WERE USED FOR WHAT IS ALLEGED TO BE IN THE OFFING, INCLUDING INSTITUTIONALIZATION, NATIONAL RECONCILIATION, REOPENING, AND (THE CURRENT FAVORITE) DE-COMPRESSION. ARENA PRESIDENT PETRONIO PORTELLA, PRESUMABLY LOATH TO ENTERTAIN PEJORATIVE IMPLICATIONS ABOUT THE PROCESS TO DATE, PREFERRED TO SPEAK MORE VAGUELY--AND PERHAPS MORE ACCURATELY--OF A "NEW STYLE."

3. IN FACT, PORTELLA HIMSELF HAS FIGURED IN ONE OF THE DEVELOPMENTS WHICH FIRST GAVE RISE TO THE DISCUSSION, THE SO-CALLED PORTELLA MISSION. THIS CALLS FOR HIM, AT GEISEL'S DIRECTION, TO TOUR THE COUNTRY, MEETING WITH LOCAL ARENA LEADERS TO SEEK UNIFIED AND COHESIVE PARTY SUPPORT AT THE REGIONAL, LOCAL, AND EVEN GRASSROOTS LEVEL, FOR THE STRONGEST POSSIBLE CANDIDATES FOR THE GUBERNATORIAL AND CONGRESSIONAL ELECTIONS LATER THIS YEAR. PRESS COMMENTARY APPROVINGLY CONTRASTED PORTELLA'S (AND ARENA'S) APPARENTLY INFLUENTIAL ROLE WITH THAT OF HIS PREDECESSOR RONDON PACHECO, WHO IN 1970 CARRIED OUT A MISSION IDENTICAL IN PURPOSE BUT EMPTY OF CONTENT

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 BRASIL 01850 01 OF 03 191509Z

BECAUSE THE CANDIDATES, WERE, AS EVERYONE KNEW, ACTUALLY PICKED BY THE TOP ECHELONS OF THE GOVERNMENT ITSELF. SUBSEQUENTLY IT WAS PUBLICLY INTIMATED THAT IN KEY STATES, GEISEL WOULD MAKE THE CHOICE DIRECTLY. AS MARCH 15 APPROACHED PUBLIC COMMENT BECAME INCREASINGLY SKEPTICAL OF ANY SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TWO MISSIONS. IN FACCT, ACCORDING TO PAULO AFFONSO, SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE PRESIDENCY OF THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES, THE NAMES TO BE

PRESENTED TO GEISEL ARE TO BE SELECTED BY GEISEL'S CHIEF ADVISOR, GENERAL GOLBERY, AND MINISTER OF JUSTICE ARMANDO FALCAO (SEE BELOW); AND ONE ALLEGED SELECTION, THAT OF PAULO EGIDIO MARTINS FOR SAO PAULO, HAS ALREADY BEEN REPORTED IN THE PRESS.

4. PORTELLA ALSO ANNOUNCED THAT AS A SIGN OF THE HEIGHTENED PRESTIGE AND INFLUENCE TO BE ENJOYED HENCEFORTH BY THE LEGISLATIVE BRANCH, CONGRESSMEN WOULD BE INVITED TO PARTICIPATE IN DISCUSSIONS WITH GOVERNMENTAL TECHNICIANS WHILE PROJECTED LEGISLATION WAS STILL IN ITS FORMATIVE STAGES. WHILE SOME, INCLUDING THE INDEPENDENT JORNAL DO BRASIL, REACTED FAVORABLY TO THE IDEA, OTHERS PERCEIVED THE VITIATION OF THE TRUE LEGISLATIVE ROLE THAT COULD RUSELUT, AND CONSIDERABLE CRITICISM ENSUED. BOTH PORTELLA AND THE JORNAL STUCK TO THEIR GUNS, HOWEVER, AND AS AN APPARENTLY WELL-INTENDED EFFORT TO FOSTER EXECUTIVE-LEGISLATIVE CONSULTATION AND DIALOGUE, THE PROPOSAL MAY STILL BEAR SOME FRUIT.

5. THE VISIT TO RIO IN EARLY FEBRUARY OF HARVARD PROFESSOR SAMUEL HUNTINGTON ALSO CONTRIBUTED TO DISCUSSION OF "DECOMPRESSION"--HUNTINGTON'S TERM. AS REPORTED IN RIO'S A-24 OF FEBRUARY 16, 1974, HUNTINGTON MET WITH VARIOUS OFFICIALS ON THE GEISEL TEAM, INCLUDING GOLBERY, WHO WAS INTERESTED IN IDENTIFYING SAFE MEANS OF ACCOMPLISHING DECOMPRESSION. WHILE "DECOMPRESSION" QUICKLY CAUGHT ON AS THE FASHIONABLE TERM IN POLITICAL CIRCLES, MEDIA DISCUSSION WAS SLIGHT. THOSE WHO DID COMMENT--JORNAL DO BRASIL, COLUMNIST CARLOS CASTELLO BRANCO, AND THE BI-WEEKLY VISSAO--AGREED ON THE CENTRAL THESIS THAT DECOMPRESSION MUST BE GRADUAL, AND THAT TOO RAPID A RATE RISKS A CORRESPONDING BACKLASH IN REACTION ("RECOMPRESSION"). ALL THREE COMMENTS TOOK MORE OR LESS FOR GRANTED THAT SOME DECOMPRESSION WAS IN CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 BRASIL 01850 01 OF 03 191509Z

PROSPECT. THE JORNAL'S LENGTHY EDITORIAL PRAISED HUNTINGTON'S VIEWS AND DECLARED, "THERE CAN BE NO POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT WITHOUT A POLITICAL CONSCIENCE WHICH MUST ALWAYS BE UPDATED BY FOREIGN AND BRAZILIAN SCHOLARS." CASTELLO BRANCO FELT THE SITUATION AT THE END OF THE MEDICI REGIME WAS REALLY "POLITICAL STAGNATION AIDED BY THE ANESTHESIA OF ADMINISTRATIVE AND ECONOMIC SUCCESS."

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 01 BRASIL 01850 02 OF 03 191458Z

44

ACTION ARA-20

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 3 BRASILIA 1850

6. ALSO HEARALDED, ALTHOUGH CAUTIOUSLY, AS A SIGN OF REOPENING WAS THE FEBRUARY 19 MEETING BETWEEN CARDINAL PAULO EVARISTO ARNS AND GENERAL GOLBERY. INITIALLY MORE GUARDED IN THEIR EXPECTATIONS THAN OFFICIAL CHURCH STATEMENTS SUGGESTED, CARDINAL ARNS AND OTHER MEMBERS OF THE HIERARCHY APPEAR, ACCORDING TO CONGEN SAO PAULO, TO HAVE RENEWED THEIR OPTIMISM THAT THERE WILL BE SIGNIFICANT DIMPROVEMENT UNDER GEISEL--NOT ONLY IN CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS BUT ALS IN TERMS OF A BROADER POLITICAL OPENING. THE CONGEN CONTINUES, "GOLBERY IS REPORTED TO HAVE TOLD THE CARDINAL NOT TO EXPECT ANY INSTITUTIONAL CHANGES DURING THE FIRST YEAR OF THE GEISEL ADMINISTRATION BEYOND THE INITIATION OF A MORE OPEN POLITICAL DIALOGUE. WITHOUT BEING SPECIFIC, HOWEVER, GOLBERY REPORTEDLY LED THE CARDINAL TO EXPECT GREATER LIBERALIZATION OF THE SYSTEM DURING GEISEL'S SECOND YEAR IN OFFICE, PARTICULARLY IN THE AREA OF POLITICAL RIGHTS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES. OUR CHURCH SOURCES BELIEVE THAT THE MONTHLY CONTACTS WHICH HAVE TAKEN PLACE IN RECENT MONTHS BETWEEN MILITARY OFFICERS REPRESENTING GENERAL GEISEL AND REPRESENTATIVES OF THE CNBB WILL NOT ONLY CONTINUE BUT WILL GRADUALLY SHAPE INTO A MORE MEANINGFUL DIALOGUE OF CONCRETE WAYS TO SOLVE OUTSTANDING PROBLEMS BETWEEN CHURCH AND STATE. WE HAVE BEEN TOLD THAT CHURCH AUTHORITIES AROUND

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 BRASIL 01850 02 OF 03 191458Z

THE COUNTRY ARE ALMOST UNIFORMLY OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THE PROSPECTS FOR AN IMPROVEMENT IN RELATIONS AND THAT EVEN

DOM HELDER CAMARA IS RESERVING JUDGMENT."

7. ACCORDING TO CONGEN RIO, "LIMITED BROADENING OF THE DECISION-MAKING BASE, THE LIFTING OF PRIOR CENSORSHIP OF THE NEWSPAPERS, AND THE ENDING OF INTERROGATIONS AND THE TORTURE OF SUBVERSIVES ARE AMONG THE REVELATIONS" MADE TO CHURCH LEADERS BY GEISEL ADMINISTRATION REPRESENTATIVES. "CHURCH LEADERS, WHILE PLEASED WITH THESE ASSURANCES, HAVE EXPLAINED THAT AN INFORMAL CHURCH-STATE ACCORD CONTAINING AN ACROSS-THE-BOARD CHURCH ENDORSEMENT OF THE ADMINISTRATION THAT THE CONTINUING DIALOGUE WILL HELP DISPEL THE ATMOSPHERE OF CONFRONTATION WHICH EXISTED BETWEEN THE CHURCH AND PAST MILITARY GOVERNMENTS." THE CONGEN COMMENTS, "THE REVELATIONS BY GEISEL REPRESENTATIVES AS TO THE NEW DIRECTIONS OF THE INCOMING ADMINISTRATION HAVE NOT BEEN MADE EXCLUSIVELY TO THE CHURCH LEADERSHIP. OUR CHECKS WITH LOCAL POLITICAL LEADERS AND TOP NEWSPAPER EDITORS INDICATE THAT THEY TOO HAVE RECEIVED THE SAME MESSAGE FROM GOLBERY, HIS LIEUTENANTS, OR EVEN FROM GEISEL HIMSELF."

8. THE NAMING OF THREE POLITICIANS TO THE GEISEL CABINET FURTHER ADDED TO DISCUSSION OF A NEW OPENING TO THE POLITICAL SECTOR. AWARE THAT NEY BRAGO IS A FORMER ARMY OFFICER AND ARNALDO PRIETO IS FREE OF THE TAIN OF PRE-1964 POLITICAL PROMINENCE, COMMENT CENTERED ON "OLD POL" ARMANDO FALCAO AND HIS ANTICIPATED ROLE AS MINISTER OF JUSTICE. THE IDEA IN THIS CASE WAS THAT FALCAO WOULD USE HIS EXTRAORDINARY CAPACITY FOR ADAPTATION AND HIS REDOUBTABLE GENERAL POLITICAL TALENTS AND EXPERIENCE TO ESTABLISH A DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND THE PRESS, CHURCH, AND CONGRESS. ACCORDING TO AN EMBASSY SOURCE, GEISEL HIMSELF INSTRUCTED FALCAO TO THIS EFFECT, AND "SOURCES CLOSE TO FALCAO" HAVE BEEN CITED AS DECLARING THESE SECTORS TO BE HIS PRINCIPAL TARGET AREAS. FALCAO HIMSELF VOWED TO "FILL THE HALLS OF THE MINISTRY OF JUSTICE WITH CASSOCKS AND LONGHAIRS." SOME OF THE COMMENT, HOWEVER, ALSO TOOK DUE ACCOUNT OF FALCAO'S WELL-ESTABLISHED REGARD FOR LAW AND ORDER. NEVERTHELESS, POINTED OUT THE NEWS-WEEKLY VEJA, THE PORTFOLIOS GIVEN THE POLITICIANS IN THE CABINET--JUSTICE, EDUCATION AND CULTURE, AND LABOR--

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 BRASIL 01850 02 OF 03 191458Z

"WERE PRECISELY THOSE SECTORS IN WHICH THE REVOLUTION INTERVENED MOST DRASTICALLY. THUS, THEY ARE THE AREAS WHICH NEED PROFESSIONAL CONCILIATORS."

9. SINCE THEN, VARIOUS CONGRESSMEN HAVE SPOKEN ENTHUSIASTICALLY TO EMBASSY OFFICERS ABOUT FALCAO'S CAPACITIES AND THE NEW ADMINISTRATION'S INTENTIONS. SINCE HIS MEETING WITH GOLBERY --WHICH WAS ARRANGED BY FALCAO--CHAMBER PRESIDENT FLAVIO MARCILIO, WHO HAS BEEN PUSHING FOR REFORM BUT WAS

PREVIOUSLY PRIVATELY SKEPTICAL THAT AND REAL OPENING
WOULD TAKE PLACE, APPEARS NOW TO BE SINCERELY HOPEFUL.
OTHER CONGRESSMEN, INCLUDING EVEN RADICAL MDB AUTENTICO
MARCOS FREIRE, HAVE SPOKEN TO EMBASSY OFFICERS IN SIMILAR
TERMS, AND A SUBSTANTIAL CROWD OF CONGRESSMEN WENT TO THE
AIRPORT TO WELCOME FALCAO UPON HIS ARRIVAL IN BRASILIA.

10. COMMENT: SOME OF THE ASSERTIONS ABOUT THE EXTENT OF
THE "DECOMPRESSION" HAVE BEEN FATUOUS, EVEN RIDICULOUS.
FOR EXAMPLE, THE POSSIBILITY THAT FALCAO WOULD ACCEPT THE
OFFER OF AN INTERIM OFFICE IN THE FORMER CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES
IN RIO WAS CITED AS A FURTHER INSTANCE OF INCREASED TIES
BETWEEN THE EXECUTIVE AND LEGISLATIVE BRANCHES. THE EVIDENCE
SEEMS UNMISTAKABLE, HOWEVER, OF A GENUINE INTENTION ON THE
PART OF THE NEW ADMINISTRATION TO ESTABLISH A DIALOGUE
WITH HERETOFORE DISAFFECTED (THE CHURCH, INTELLECTUALS,
STUDENTS) OR LARGELY DISREGARDED (CONGRESS, THE POLITICAL
CLASS) SECTORS. IT IS A MEASURE OF HOW HUNGRY FOR ATTENTION
AND A SENSE OF PARTICIPATION THE LATTER HAVE BEEN THAT THE
SHOULD BE REACTING AS FAVORABLY AS THEY ARE TO THE PROSPECT
OF WHAT MAY BE ONLY OCCASIONAL CONVERSATION. MDB LEADERS
DURING THE TWO-MONTH PERIOD HAVE SHOWN CONSIDERABLY GREATER
RESTRAINT THAN THEIR ARENA COLLEAGUES, DOUBTLESS A REFLECTION
OF THEIR ELECTORAL INTERESTS AS WELL AS THEIR IDEOLOGICAL
INCLINATIONS. THUS WE FIND MARCOS FREIRE' RECENT
(MARCH 15) REMARKS MOST INTERESTING.

CONFIDENTIAL

NNN

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 BRASIL 01850 03 OF 03 191515Z

44

ACTION ARA-20

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 AID-20 PC-10 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 3 OF 3 BRASILIA 1850

11. THERE HAS BEEN SOME DISCUSSION OF EVEN MORE SIGNIFICANT CHANGES, E.G., THE ELIMINATION OF IA-5, OR ALTERNATIVELY ITS (WHOLE OR PARTIAL) INCORPORATION INTO THE CONSTITUTION, THUS ERADICATING ITS "EXCEPTIONAL" CONDITION. WE DO NOT ANTICIPATE, HOWEVER, THAT THE REVOLUTION WILL DIVEST ITSELF OF ITS PRINCIPAL TOOLS, OR MOVE AT ANY BUT AN EXTREMELY GRADUAL AND MEASURED PACE. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A DIALOGUE--SHOULD IT COME TO PASS--SHOULD NEVERTHELESS NOT BE DOWNGRADED. THE ENGAGEMENT OF POLITICIANS, INTELLECTUALS, AND THE CHURCH IN SERIOUS DISCUSSIONS, WHICH ARE SEEN BY THESE GROUPS TO HAVE SOME INFLUENCE ON THE COURSE OF GOVERNMENT, COULD HAVE AN IMPORTANT DECOMPRESSING EFFECT.

12. NO MATTER HOW GRADUALLY OR CAREFULLY CARRIED OUT, HOWEVER, DECOMPRESSION SEEMS CERTAIN TO BE A CONTINUING SOURCE OF DIFFICULTY FOR THE GEISEL ADMINISTRATION. ACCORDING TO CONGRESSIONAL SOURCES, FALCAO AND GOLBERY ARE TO BE THE PRINCIPAL AGENTS WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT, THE FORMER TO CONDUCT THE DIALOGUE AND THE LATTER TO KEEP THE ARMED FORCES IN LINE. EACH RUNS SOME RISK: FALCAO, NOW ENJOYING A WAVE OF GOOD FEELING, WILL BE THE SAME TOKEN BE AN OBVIOUS TARGET IF EXPECTATIONS ARE NOT MET; GOLBERY'S UNENVIABLE TASKS WILL BE ALL THE HARDER FOR THE FACT THAT
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 BRASIL 01850 03 OF 03 191515Z

HE IS A CONTRAVERSIAL MAN AMONG HIS COLLEAGUES, WHO CONSIDER HIM "TAINTED" WITH FOUNDING THE NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE SERVICE, ACCEPTING A CHEAP APPOINTMENT TO THE ACCOUNTS COURT, AND HEADING (IN BRAZIL) THE "MULTINATIONAL" DOW CHEMICAL COMPANY. MILITARY OFFICERS WILL BE KEEPING A CLOSE WATCH ON THE THREE POLITICIANS IN THE CABINET, AND SOME OFFICERS ARE ALREADY UPSET BY THE SIGNS OF TINKERING WITH A MODEL THEY CONSIDER TOO SUCCESSFUL TO REQUIRE ALTERATION, PARTICULARLY FOR THE SAKE OF GRATIFYING PRIESTS AND POLITICIANS. FOR AN EXAMPLE OF HARDLINE VIEWS, SEE
IR 6 809 0176 74 OF MARCH 15, 1974.

13. THE POTENTIAL FOR SERIOUS CONFLICT WITHIN THE ADMINISTRATION IS CLEAR. CELIO BORJA, THE INTELLIGENT, HIGHLY RESPECTED ARENA DEPUTY WHOSE APPOINTMENT AS CHAMBER MAJORITY LEADER WAS HAILED AS ANOTHER PORTENT OF DIALOGUE AND INCREASED CONGRESSIONAL PRESTIGE, HAS POINTED OUT ANOTHER POTENTIALLY TROUBLESOME ELEMENT: 1974 IS AN ELECTION YEAR IN BRAZIL, TEMPTING ARENA AND MDB CANDIDATES ALIKE TOWARD THE KINDS OF STATEMENTS AND ACTIONS THAT WILL TEND TO CONFIRM THE WORST FEARS HARBORED WITHIN STILL IMPORTANT SECTORS OF THE ARMED FORCES.

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